

Best Christmas Story of the Month

Colonel Crockett's Co-operative Christmas.

By RUPERT HUGHES.
In "The Saturday Evening Post."

(Of all the strange gatherings that have distinguished Madison Square Garden the strangest was probably on the occasion, last Christmas, when the now well-known Col. D. A. Crockett, of Waco, rented the vast auditorium for one thousand dollars, and threw it open to the public. As he is going to do it again this coming Christmas, an account of the con-in-and-reception of his scheme may interest some of the thousands who find themselves every Christmas in the Colonel's plight. My plan to describe it was frustrated by the receipt, from his wife, of three letters he wrote her. It seems only fair, then, that the author of an achievement which is likely to become an institution should be allowed to be the author of its history. I shall, therefore, content myself with publishing verbatim two of the Colonel's own letters.—Rupert Hughes.)

New York, N. Y., Dec. 26, 1903.
Friend Wife:

The miserablest night I ever spent in all my born days—the solitariest, with no seconds—was sure this identical Christmas night in New York city. And I've been some lonesome, too, in my time.

I've told you how, as a boy, I shipped before the mast—the wrong mast—and how the old tub bumped a reef and went down with all hands—and feet—except mine. You remember me telling how I grabbed ahold of a large wooden box and floated on to a dry spot. It knocked the wind out of my stummick considerable, but I hung on kind of unconscious till the tide went out. When I come to, I looked round to see where in Sam Hill I was at, and found I was on a little pinhead of an island about the size of a freckle would be on the moon. All around was mostly sky, excepting for what was water. And me with nothing to drink it with!

I set down hard on the box and felt as blue as all the swear words ever swore. There was nothing in sight to eat, and that made me so hungry that me and the box fell over backward. As I laid there sprawled out, with my feet up on the box, I looked between my knees and read them beautiful words, "East Buggins' Biscuit."

Well, me and friend Buggins in-

habited that place—about as big as one of Man Friday's footprints—for going on four weeks. When tide was in, I held the box on my head to keep my powder dry. Long toward the end of my visit, just before the ship that saved me hove in sight, I began to feel a mite tired of that place. I kind o' felt as if I'd saw about all they was int'resing on that there island. I thought I was unhappy and I had a sneaking idea I was lonesome. But I see I was mistaken. I hadn't spent a Christmas night alone in a big city then.

Then once when I was prospecting for our mine, I was snowed up in a pass. I reckon I've told you how I got typhoid fever and wrestled it out all day by my lonesome; unparalleled thirst, Boston baked brains, red flannel tongue, delirium dreamins, and self-acting emetic, down to the final blissful "Where am I at?" and on through the nice long convalescence till my limbs changed from twine strings to human members. Six weeks doing time as doctor, patient, trained nurse and fellow-Mason all in one, was being alone right smart. But it wasn't a patch on the little metropolis of Manhattan on Santa Claus day.

Then once I had a rather unrestful evening out in the western part of Texas. A fellow sold me a horse right cheap, and later a crowd of gentlemen accused me of stealing it, and I was put in jail with a promise of being lynched before breakfast. That was being uncomfortable some, too. But I wished last night that my friend, Judge Watson, hadn't come along that night and identified me. It would have saved me from New Yorkitis. Then there was the night when I proposed for your hand and you sent me to your pa, and he said if I ever come near again he'd sick the dogs on me. I spent that night at a safe distance from the dogs, leaning on a fence, and not noticing it was barb wire till I looked at my clothes and my hide next day. I watched your windows till the light went out and all my hope with it—and on after that till, as the poet says, till daylight doth appear.

Then ther's the time I told you about when—but there's no use of making a catalogue of every time I've been lonesome. I have taken my pen in hand to inform you that last night beat everything else on my private list of troubles. My other lonely times was when I was alone, but the loneliest of all was in the heart of

the biggest crowd on this here continent.

There was people aplenty. But I didn't know one goldarned galoot. I had plenty of money, but nobody to spend it on—except tiptakers. I was stopping at this big hotel with lugsury spread over everything thicker than sorghum on corn pone. But lonely—why, honey, I was so lonely that, as I walked along the streets, I felt as if I'd like to break into some of the homes and compel 'em at the point of my gun to let me set in and dine with 'em.

I felt like asking one of the bellboys to take me home and get his ma give me a slice of goose and let her talk to me about her folks.

There was some four million people in a space about the size of our ranch. There was theaters to go to—but who wants to go to the theater on Christmas?—it's like going to church on the Fourth of July. There were dime muzhums, penny vawdevilles, dance-halls.

There was a big dinner for news-boys. The Salvation Army and the Volunteers gave feed to the poor. But I couldn't qualify. I wasn't poor. I had no home, no friends, no nothing.

The streets got deserted and deserted. A few other wretches was marooned like me in the hotel corridors. We looked at each other like sneak-thieves patrolling the same street. Waiters glanced at us pitiful as much as to say, "If it wasn't for shrimps like you, I'd be home with my kids."

The worst of it was, I knew there were thousands of people in town in just my fix. Perhaps some of them were old friends of mine that I'd have been tickled to death to foregather with; or leastways, people from my State. Texas is a big place, but we'd have been brothers and sisters—or at least cousins once removed—for Christmas's sake.

But they were scattered around at the St. Regis or the Mills Hotel, the Martha Washington of somewhere, while I was at the Waldorf-hyphen-Astoria.

It was like the two men that Dickens—I believe it was Dickens—tells about: Somebody give A a concertina, but he can't play on it; winter coming on and no overcoat; he can't wear the concertina any more than he can tootle it. A few blocks away is a fellow, Mr. B. He can play a concertina something grand, but he hasn't got one and his fingers itch. He spends all his ready money on a brand new overcoat, and just then his aunt sends him another one. He thinks he'll just swap one of them overcoats for a concertina. So he advertises in an exchange column. About the same time, A advertises that he'll trade one house-broken concertina for a nice overcoat. But does either

A or B ever see Be's or A's advertisements? Not on your beautiful daguerreotype.

That was the way with us all in New York. The town was full of lonesome strangers, and we went moping around, stumbling over each other and not daring to speak.

They call us "transients" here. It's like a private soldier that's killed in a battle; he's only a "casualty." So us poor, homeless dogs in New York are only transients. Why, do you know, I was that lonely I could have stood out in the square like a lonely old cow out in the rain, and just moored for somebody to take me in.

I'd have telegraphed for you and the children to come to town, but Texas is so far away, and you'd have got here too late, and you couldn't come anyway, being sick, as you wrote me, and one of the kids having malarial. How is his blessed self today? I hope you're feeling better. Telegraph if you aint, and I'll take the first train home.

Well, last night I ate a horrible mockery of a Christmas dinner in a deserted restaurant, and it gave me heartburn (in addition to heartache) and a whole brood-stable of nightmares. I went to bed early, and stayed awake late.

I tried Philosophy—the next station beyond Despair. I said to myself, "You old fool, why in the name of all that's sensible should you feel so excited about one day more than another?" I wasn't so lonely the day before Christmas, I ain't so lonely to-day, but then I was like a small boy with the mumps and the earache on the Fourth of July. The firecracker will pop just as lively another day, but—well, the universe was simply throwed all out of gear, like it must have been when Joshua held up the moon—or was it the sun?

You remember reading once about—I reckon it was Mr. Aldritch's pleasing idea of the last man on earth; everybody killed off by a pestilence or something, and him setting there by his lonely little lonesome; an' what would he have done if he had heard his doorbell ring? Well, I reckon he'd have done what I'd have done if I'd met a friend—given one wild whoop, wrapped his arms round his neck, kissed him on both cheeks, and died with a faint gurgle of joy.

Finally, I swore that if I ever for-saw myself being corralled again in a strange city on Christmas, I'd put on a sandwich board or something and march up and down the streets with a sign like this:

I'm lonely!
I'm homesick for a real
Christmas!
There must be others.
Let's get together!
Meet me at the Fountain

La Vielle Cigar Co.

10 W. 2d South St.

Finest Stock of imported Cigars in the city, including HENRY THE FOURTH, SANCHEZ Y. HAYA, American and other choice brands. Fine assortment of Pipes, Tobacco and all smokers' articles. Also, Pure wholesome candies, Franklin's, Allegretti's and Metcalf's, choicest makes.

La Vielle's is the place for Christmas presents. There will be found reliable goods at fair prices.